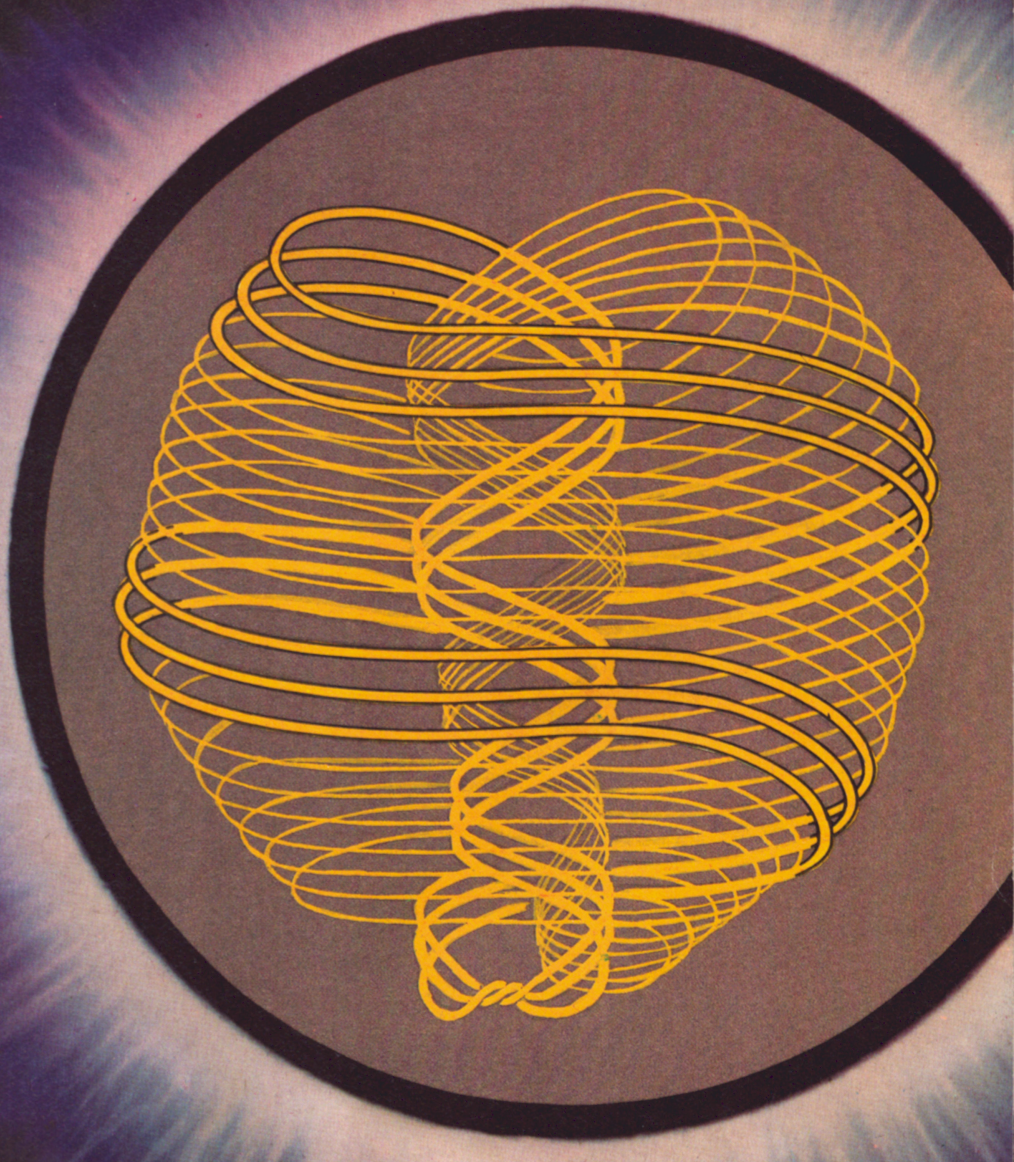
60p

# THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

ESP unlimited
Surgery or sleight of hand?
Objects from nowhere
Classic UFO abduction
Occult chemistry

91



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# THE Unexplained
MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

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# Mystery of the lost week

**Three young Frenchmen hit the news headlines in early December 1979 with a tale about a UFO abduction at Cergy-Pontoise. But was their amazing story a fabrication? HILARY EVANS sorts out the facts from the fiction**

'FRENCHMAN BACK TO EARTH with a bump' was the headline in the London *Times* – and across the world the media reported the news with the same uncertainty whether to take it seriously or not. But this much was certain: Franck Fontaine, who had allegedly been kidnapped by a UFO a week before, had been restored to friends, family, and a wondering world in the early hours of Monday, 3 December 1979.

Where had he spent those seven days? The world, hoping for a story that would make the Moon landing seem tame, was disappointed. Fontaine's recollections were few and confused. It seemed to him he had simply dropped off to sleep for half an hour: he was astonished and dismayed to find he had been away for a week. He attributed the strange images in his mind to dreams: he was bewildered to learn that he might have been abducted by extra-terrestrial aliens and carried to their distant world.

Police search a field in Cergy-Pontoise, France, for clues to the disappearance of Franck Fontaine, reported as having been abducted by a UFO. Fontaine's two friends, Jean-Pierre Prévost and Salomon N'Diaye, said they had witnessed the kidnapping early one morning in late November 1979. In the background is the block of flats in which Prévost and N'Diaye lived and near which the event occurred

Fontaine was no less dismayed to find himself the focus of the world's attention. During his seven-day absence, it had been his friends Salomon N'Diaye and Jean-Pierre Prévost, witnesses of his abduction, who had been the objects of attention. Ever since their first startling telephone call to the police – 'A friend of mine's just been carried off by a UFO!' – they had been subjected to interrogation by the police, by the press, and by UFO investigative groups ranging from the scientific to the bizarre. If Fontaine's return brought renewed publicity and fresh problems, at least it cleared them of the suspicion that they were responsible for their friend's disappearance – perhaps even his death.

The life-style of the three young men was not of a sort to dispel suspicion. All three – Prévost, aged 26, N'Diaye, 25, Fontaine, 18 – scraped an uncertain living by selling jeans in street markets. They drove an old car that was unlicensed and uninsured, none of them having a driving licence. Prévost was a self-declared anarchist. He and N'Diaye lived next door to each other in a modern block at Cergy-Pontoise on the outskirts of Paris. Fontaine lived 2 miles (3 kilometres) away.

According to their account, Fontaine had

spent Sunday evéning in Prévost's flat because they wanted to be up by 3.30 a.m. to travel the 35 miles (60 kilometres) to the street market at Gisors. The market didn't start until 8 a.m. but they wanted a good place. Besides, their Taunus estate car had been acting up lately, so they thought it prudent to allow extra time. At 3.30, after only about four hours' sleep, they were up and ready to load the car with clothes.

First, though, they gave the car a push-start to make sure the engine would function. Having got it going, they decided that Fontaine should stay in the car to make sure it didn't stop again while the other two got on with the loading. Fontaine had leisure to look about him, and so it was that he noticed a brilliant light in the sky some distance away. When his companions arrived with their next load, he pointed the object out. It was cylindrical in shape, but otherwise unidentifiable. When it moved behind the block of flats, N'Diaye rushed upstairs to fetch a camera, thinking he might take a photograph of the object to sell to the newspapers. Prévost went in to get another load of clothing while Fontaine, hoping for another view of the mysterious object, drove up onto the main road that ran close by the flats.

Top: Franck Fontaine leaving the police station after being questioned upon his safe return. He said that his 'missing week' was a blank in his mind

Salomon N'Diaye (above) and Jean-Pierre Prévost (right) reported the UFO incident to the police at once – a fact that convinced many they were telling the truth

Hearing the sound of the moving vehicle, his companions looked out of the windows of their respective flats. Both saw that Fontaine had stopped the car on the main road and noted that the engine was no longer running. Prévost, angry because they would probably have to push-start the car a second time, rushed downstairs again. He called to N'Diaye to forget about his camera because the UFO had vanished. N'Diaye came after him saying that in any case he had no film in his camera, and adding that from his window it had looked as though the car was surrounded by a great ball of light.

Outdoors again, the two young men stopped in amazement: the rear of their car was enveloped in a sharply defined sphere of glowing mist, near which a number of smaller balls of light were moving about. While they stood watching, they saw the larger globe absorb all but one of the smaller ones. Then a beam of light emerged, which grew in size until it was like the cylindrical shape they had seen earlier. The large sphere seemed to enter this cylinder, which shot up into the sky and disappeared from sight.

The two hurried to the car, but found no sign of Fontaine. He was not in the car, in the road, or in the cabbage field beside the road. Prévost insisted on calling the police immediately and N'Diaye went off to do so. Prévost, remaining near the car, was the only witness to the last phase of the incident: a ball of light, like those previously moving about

the car, seemed to push the car door shut. Then it too vanished.

Such was the account that the two young men gave to the police on their arrival a few minutes later. Because UFO sightings are a military matter in France, the police instructed Prévost and N'Diaye to inform the gendarmerie, which comes under the Ministry of National Defence. The two spent most of the day with the gendarmes, telling and retelling the story. The interrogators stopped for lunch, during which time the witnesses telephoned the press with their story. Later, Commandant Courcoux of the Cergy gendarmerie told the press that there were no grounds for disbelieving the young men's story, that he had no doubt 'something' had occurred, and that he could give no indication of what that 'something' might be. In a later interview he admitted, 'We are swimming in fantasy.'

For a week, that was all the world knew. During that week, the young men were questioned over and over again. Some people accepted the UFO story as it stood. Others suspected it to be a smokescreen, perhaps a cunning plan to help Fontaine avoid doing his military service, perhaps something more sinister. But one fact stood out clearly: Prévost and N'Diaye had informed the police promptly and voluntarily. Given their backgrounds, wasn't this convincing proof of their sincerity?

When Fontaine gave his version of the story, there seemed no reason to question his sincerity either. He told how he had woken to find himself lying in the cabbage field. Getting to his feet, he realised he was just across the main road from the flats, close to where he had stopped the car to watch the UFO. But the car was no longer there. His first thought, as he hurried towards the still-darkened building, was that somebody had stolen their car and its valuable load of clothing. Neither Prévost nor N'Diaye was to be seen, so he rushed upstairs and rang the bell of Prévost's flat. When there was no reply, he went to N'Diaye's. A sleepy N'Diaye appeared, gawped at him in amazement, then flung his arms round him in delighted welcome. Fontaine, already surprised to find his friend in his night clothes, was even more amazed to learn that an entire week had gone by since the morning of the Gisors market.

He had little to tell the press or the police. The world's media reported his return but reserved judgement till they heard what the authorities had to say. But the police declared it was no longer their business: no crime had been committed. Apart from the inherent improbability of Fontaine's story, they had no reason to doubt his word or that of his friends.

Jimmy Guieu, well-known science fiction writer and founder of a UFO group. The trio put themselves into his hands exclusively; other UFO investigators found them to be very unco-operative

### Besieged by ufologists

So now it was up to the UFO organisations to see what further light could be thrown on the case. From the start, the witnesses had been besieged by the various French groups; there are dozens of these, most of them fiercely independent and reluctant to co-operate with the others. One of the most reputable of all is Control, to whom we owe most of what we now know of the inside story of the Cergy-Pontoise case.

But another group declared its interest before Control, while Fontaine was still missing: the *Institut Mondial des Sciences Avancés* (World Institute of Advanced Sciences). Its co-founder and spokesman was the well-known science fiction writer and author of two books about UFOs, Jimmy

Right: the cylinder-shaped UFO seen by the three friends appeared to have a diameter larger than that of the full Moon that night. It had a rounded front end and a tail that trailed off into a hazy cloud. It was when Fontaine went closer to the UFO – alone – that he disappeared

Jimmy Guieu's book *Cergy-Pontoise UFO contacts* (top) and Jean-Pierre Prévost's book *The truth about the Cergy-Pontoise affair* (above). Both were published speedily after the alleged kidnapping of Franck Fontaine. Both were long on fantasy and short on facts, disappointing all who hoped for some clarification of what had really happened

Guieu. Before he had carried out an investigation, Guieu affirmed his belief in the story: 'No question of it, Franck Fontaine has been abducted on board a UFO,' he stated in an interview. 'Admittedly I haven't questioned the young man's two companions, but I hold their account to be true a priori.'

Delighted to have their story accepted without reservation by so eminent an authority, Fontaine's two friends agreed to co-operate with Guieu. When Fontaine returned, he too was taken under IMSA's wing. Guieu offered them a secret refuge in the south of France where they could work on a book together, Guieu writing it and all sharing the proceeds.

Guieu's book, *Cergy-Pontoise UFO contacts*, was rushed into print with astonishing speed, appearing a bare four months after Fontaine's return. Thanks to the combination of Guieu's name and the intense interest in the case, it was an instant best-seller. But readers hoping for a conclusive verdict were disappointed. The book was padded out by Guieu's journalistic style and digressive accounts of other cases, and there was an almost total absence of first-hand testimony from the principal witness – the abducted Fontaine – whose story the world wanted to hear. Such revelations as the book contained were of quite another nature.

Guieu had hoped that Fontaine would be able to recall more of his adventure if he were hypnotised, but the young man obstinately refused to submit to hypnosis. Then Prévost suggested that he should be hypnotised instead. What resulted was truly amazing. It now emerged that Prévost, not Fontaine, had been the true object of alien interest. Now, speaking through him, the aliens explained all. Fontaine had simply been the means to establish communication: Prévost was the channel through whom they could communicate to help save Earth from impending disaster. The aliens identified themselves as 'the intelligences from beyond' but gave no clearer clue to the whereabouts of 'beyond' than that it is 'a planet not like yours'. Their spokesman was Haurrio, a friendly if somewhat garrulous character.

In Guieu's book, Prévost becomes the hero of the story and the only evidence we have for the events is his word. His two companions seem to have become irrelevant. This book having raised more questions than it answered, much was hoped for when Prévost announced that he was writing his own account of the event. But *The truth about the Cergy-Pontoise affair*, published later that same year, was even less satisfactory. It was a rambling, incoherent farrago in which great doses of alien 'philosophy' – transmitted by Prévost – show that pious platitudes about the need for more love and less science are not confined to planet Earth.

There is virtually no mention of Franck Fontaine's abduction: indeed, he and Salomon N'Diaye are scarcely referred to. But Prévost's visit to a secret alien base is described in some detail, and this gives us a good yardstick for evaluating the rest of the material. It seems that one morning soon

Above: a group of people anticipate a close encounter with aliens at Cergy-Pontoise on 15 August 1980. They gathered there when Fontaine revealed that he had made an arrangement to meet on that day with his abductors of the previous December

Left: a being named Haurrio allegedly contacted Prévost on behalf of the 'intelligences from beyond'. On one occasion Haurrio was dressed in a one-piece silver garment, looking decidedly 'like an alien'. On another he had long blond hair and looked like a masculine woman in a suit. He was said to be friendly and very talkative

after Fontaine's return, there was a ring at Prévost's door. The caller was a travelling salesman, a total stranger who said he had to make a trip to Bourg-de-Sirod and invited Prévost to come along. Now, Bourg-de-Sirod is a small village near the Swiss border some 225 miles (360 kilometres) from Cergy. On the face of it, there is no conceivable reason why a salesman should go there, nor why he should think that Prévost might wish to go there given that they were strangers in the first place.

However, there was a reason for interest by Prévost. Bourg-de-Sirod was a specially significant place for him because as a child he had gone to a summer camp nearby and had later worked there. More recently still, he and Fontaine had spent a camping holiday there. So Prévost, though surprised at the stranger's offer, cheerfully accepted it. The salesman dropped him off at the village and he set off up the hill towards a particular site that had always fascinated him – a railway tunnel containing an abandoned train carriage from the Second World War.

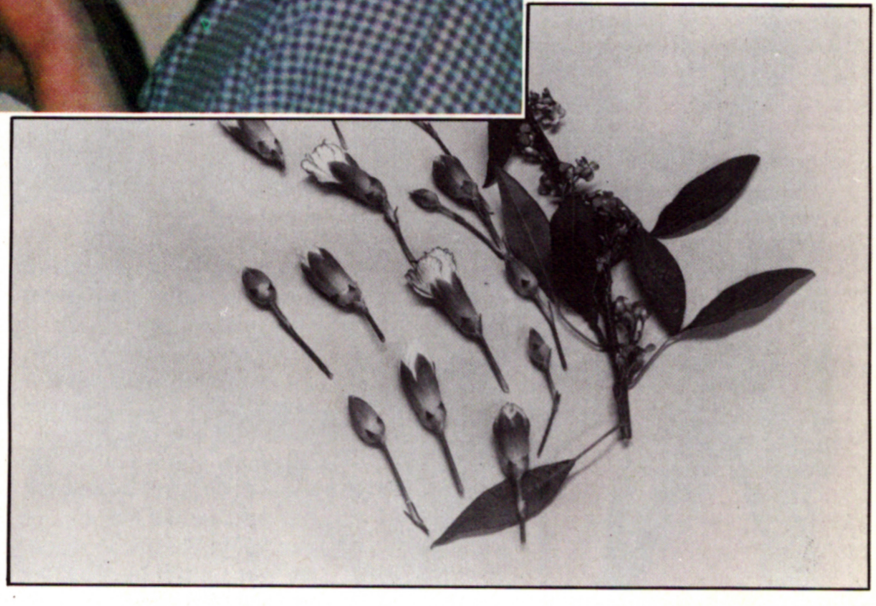
Arriving at the tunnel in late evening, Prévost found that other people were there before him: a group of young men gathered round a fire in the open. One of them called out his name; he was from the Sahara and had recently written to Prévost. It turned out that he and the others had come there from many parts of the world, thanks to the 'intelligences from beyond'. Each spoke his own language – but was understood by the rest.

When Haurrio, the alien representative, arrived, he informed them that they had been chosen to spread the philosophy of the 'intelligences' on Earth. A beautiful female alien then took them on a tour of the tunnel, now being used as a UFO base. They saw several spacecraft, similar to ones that Prévost had seen as a child. After their tour, the young men returned to their camp fire and went to sleep on the ground – which, on a December night in the mountains, must have been less than comfortable. Next morning Prévost found his friendly salesman waiting to chauffeur him back to Cergy.

Whether Jimmy Guieu and Jean-Pierre Prévost seriously expected their accounts to be believed, we may never know. But the more they provided in the way of checkable statements, the harder it became to accept the original account of the alleged abduction. Doubts grew even more when an investigative team from Control persisted in taking up the case without the co-operation of the witnesses – checking all the conflicting statements and fragmented testimony as best they could.

*Was there ever an abduction by aliens at Cergy-Pontoise? See page 1854*

# Apports: a moving story



**Flowers, fresh fruit, ornaments – even living animals – have been said to have materialised as 'apports' through the physical mediumship of some particularly gifted sensitives. ROY STEMMAN describes some examples of this controversial phenomenon**

IN THE PRIVATE home circle of London medium Paul McElhoney, objects are frequently produced 'out of thin air'. These apparent materialisations are known to psychical researchers as 'apports'. Like other physical phenomena produced by mediums they usually occur in darkness and that rouses the suspicions of believers as well as sceptics. But doubts about the authenticity of apport mediumship frequently evaporate when one considers the conditions under which they are produced, or the type of object that materialises.

In the case of Paul McElhoney, several observers have reported that flowers are apported in his mouth. Spiritualist Michael Cleary told the weekly newspaper *Psychic News* (28 November 1981) of his experience at the medium's home circle a week earlier. He had searched the medium and the seance room before the proceedings began. During the seance the medium was entranced by a spirit called Ceros. 'When Ceros brought the first flowers the lights were on,' said Cleary. 'I looked into Paul's mouth. There was nothing there. Then a [fresh] flower began to fall from his mouth. Carnations are very significant in my family. I had previously asked my mother in the spirit world to bring that kind of flower. When Ceros apported a carnation for me he said it was a present from a woman in the spirit world.'

Another witness to this phenomenon was author and investigator Guy Lyon Playfair, who also received a carnation. When he got home he put it in his mouth and tried to talk as the medium had done. 'The stalk stuck in my throat. I nearly threw up. Paul talked easily and then produced the carnation.'

Flowers have been common apports for well over 150 years. One of the earliest investigators of this phenomenon was a Frenchman, Dr G. P. Billot, who witnessed the production of flower apports by a blind woman medium in October 1820.

One of the most extraordinary accounts of an apport concerns a famous English medium, Madame d'Esperance, in whose presence a materialised spirit named Yolande was said to appear. At a seance in 1880 Yolande took a glass carafe that had been half

Top: physical medium Paul McElhoney produces an apport of a fresh flower from his mouth. There were no signs that it had been regurgitated. Although flower apports (above) appear most often at his seances, other objects have materialised, such as this cast metal model of Cologne cathedral (right), which landed in the palm of SPR council member Anita Gregory – 'from nowhere'. Ceros, McElhoney's spirit guide, said it was a gift from her dead father. Mrs Gregory discovered later that her father had spent his honeymoon in a hotel overlooking Cologne cathedral

filled with sand and water and placed it in the centre of the room, covering it with a thin piece of drapery. The sitters then watched in amazement as the drapery began rising and Yolande came out of the cabinet, in which Madame d'Esperance was seated, to inspect what was happening. When she removed the drapery it was seen that a perfect plant had grown in minutes.

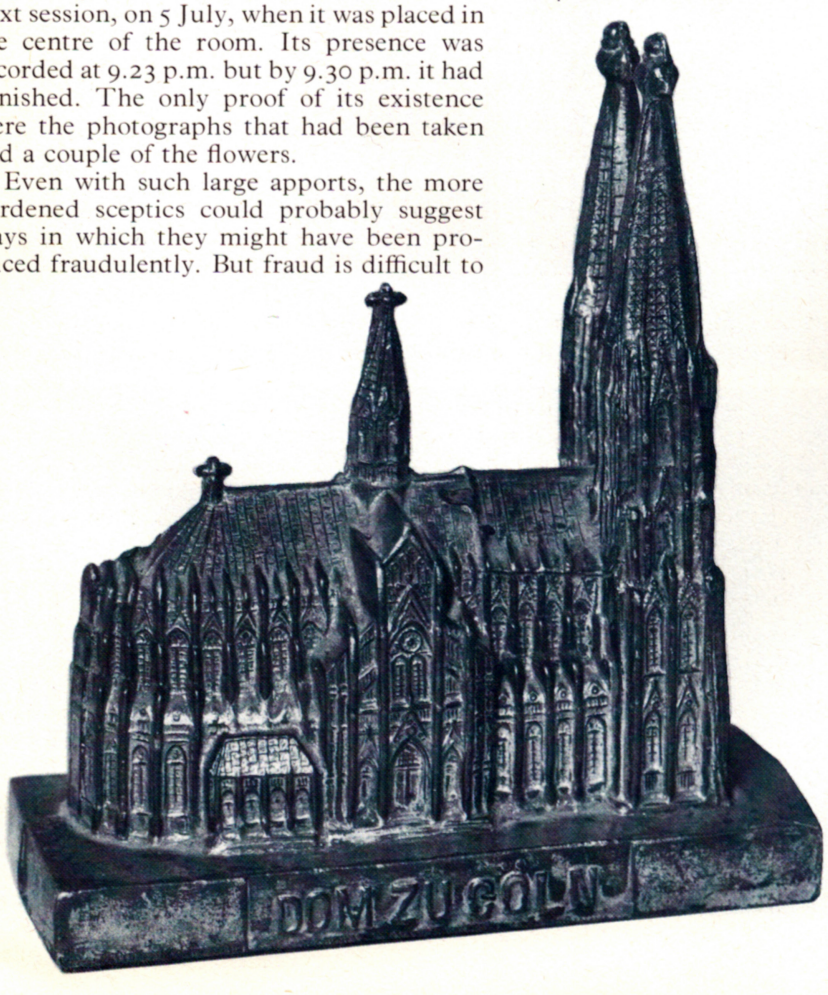
Yolande told the sitters to sing quietly for a few minutes, and when they inspected the plant again they found it had burst into bloom, with a flower 5 inches (12.5 centimetres) in diameter. It had a thick woody stem, which filled the neck of the carafe, was 22 inches (56 centimetres) high and had 29 leaves. It was subsequently identified as a native of India, *Ixora crocata*, and was kept alive for three months by the gardener of one of the witnesses.

### Living for the present

Ten years later, the same medium was responsible for an equally spectacular apport. This time – on 28 June 1890 – a beautiful golden lily with an overpowering perfume grew before the eyes of the sitters to a height of 7 feet (2 metres). Five of its 11 flowers were in full bloom, and in photographs taken at the time it was seen to tower above the medium. Yolande told the sitters, however, that it could not remain and became quite upset when she found she could not dematerialise it. She asked them to keep the plant in a darkened room until the next session, on 5 July, when it was placed in the centre of the room. Its presence was recorded at 9.23 p.m. but by 9.30 p.m. it had vanished. The only proof of its existence were the photographs that had been taken and a couple of the flowers.

Even with such large apports, the more hardened sceptics could probably suggest ways in which they might have been produced fraudulently. But fraud is difficult to accept in cases where mediums materialise items at the request of sitters, as did Agnes Nichols (later Mrs Samuel Guppy), one of the most gifted apport mediums during the 1860s and 1870s. It is recorded that one of her friends asked for a sunflower, and the medium complied with the immediate production, in a darkened seance room, of a 6-foot (1.6-metre) specimen, which arrived on a table with a mass of earth around its roots. At another seance each sitter was asked to name a fruit or vegetable; and the apports that were received were a banana, two oranges, a bunch of white grapes, a bunch of black grapes, a cluster of filberts, three walnuts, a dozen damsons, a slice of candied

Right: Madame d'Esperance, one of the foremost physical mediums of the late 19th century, with the golden lily that – through the agency of her materialised guide Yolande – literally grew in front of her sitters on 28 June 1890 to a height of 7 feet (2 metres). Exuding a strong fragrance and with 5 of its 11 flowers in bloom, it seemed solid enough – yet at her next seance Yolande dematerialised it in seven minutes. All that remained was this photograph and a couple of the flowers



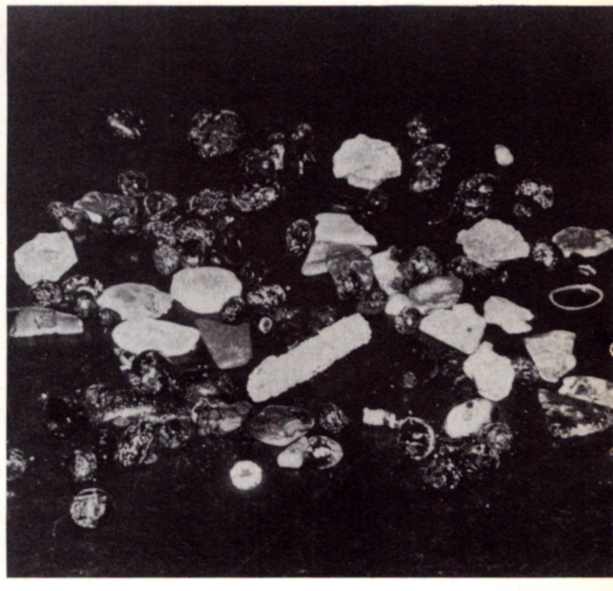

pineapple, three figs, two apples, an onion, a peach, a few almonds, three dates, a potato, two large pears, a pomegranate, two crystallised greengages, a pile of dried currants, a lemon and a large bunch of raisins.

Doves and other birds are as popular with apport mediums as they are with magicians, but their materialisation is achieved under very different conditions. An Australian bootmaker, Charles Bailey, is credited with apporting an entire menagerie during his many years as a medium. To rule out trickery, he allowed himself to be stripped, searched and dressed in clothes supplied by investigators. Dr C. W. McCarthy, an eminent medical man in Sydney, imposed even more stringent test conditions. Having searched Bailey, he then placed the medium in a sack with holes for his hands, and tied him up.

On occasions the sitters were searched as well and the medium placed inside a cage

covered with mosquito netting. The door to the room was locked or sealed, the fireplace was blocked and paper pasted over the window. The only furniture allowed in the room was a table and chairs for the sitters. Yet, after a few minutes of darkness, when the lights were put on Bailey was found to be holding apports, such as two nests with a live bird in each. At other seances he produced a live, 18-inch (46-centimetre), shovel-nosed shark and a crab dripping in seaweed. Many of the live apports produced at his seances disappeared as mysteriously as they had arrived.

Later in his career, Bailey's mediumship was found to be far from convincing by a number of investigators who produced evidence to show that he had purchased the 'apports' from animal dealers. But others remained convinced that some of his phenomena were genuine.



Above: the American medium Keith Milton Rhinehart, whose public demonstration in London in the 1960s provoked a guarded reaction from some members of the audience. He produced several objects (above right) from his mouth, including a prickly sea horse, but there is some evidence that he had merely regurgitated them

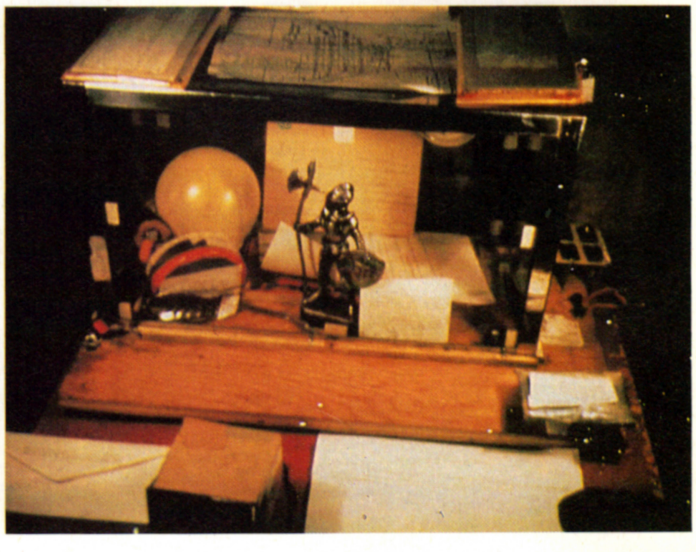
Below: two frames from one of the controversial films taken at Rolla, Missouri, USA, which allegedly show the paranormal movement of objects through the glass wall of the minilab. Despite several years of research, none of the minilab pioneers has managed to induce PK on the scale of the physical mediums

### Accessories and allegations

But where do apports come from? The 'spirit control' of a famous medium, Mrs Everitt, refused to produce them. 'I do not approve of bringing them,' she explained cryptically, 'for they are generally stolen.' There have been well-corroborated cases, however, where an apport has been an object that has been dematerialised from one place and rematerialised in another, sometimes at a sitter's request. This account was written by Ernesto Bozzano, an eminent Italian psychical researcher:

> In March, 1904, in a sitting in the house of Cavaliere Peretti, in which the medium was an intimate friend of ours, gifted with remarkable physical mediumship, and with whom apports could be obtained at command, I begged the communicating spirit to bring me a small block of pyrites which was lying on my writing table about two kilometres [1.2 miles] away. The spirit replied (through the entranced medium) that the power was almost exhausted but that all the same he would make the attempt.
>
> Soon after the medium sustained the usual spasmodic twitchings which signified the arrival of an apport, but without our hearing the fall of any object on the table or floor. We asked for an explanation from the spirit operator, who informed us that although he had managed to disintegrate a portion of the object desired, and had brought it into the room, there was not enough power for him to . . . re-integrate it.
>
> He added, 'Light the light.' We did so, and found, to our great surprise, that the table, the clothes and hair of the sitters, as well as the furniture and carpets of the room, were covered with the thinnest layer of brilliant impalpable pyrites. When I returned home after the sitting I found the little block of pyrites lying on my writing table from which a large fragment, about one third of the whole piece, was missing.

Apport mediums seem to use different psychic techniques to produce the phenomenon, but with some the object seems to materialise

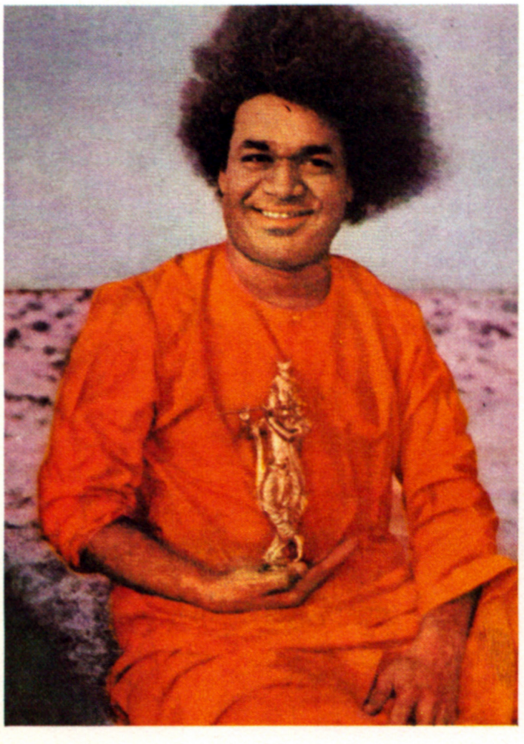


out of their bodies. T. Lynn, a miner from the north of England, was photographed producing apports in this way. Small ectoplasmic shapes were often seen extending from his body, usually near the solar plexus, and Hewat McKenzie and Major C. Mowbray tested Lynn at the British College of Psychic Science, London, in 1928. The medium was put in a bag and his hands were tied to his knees with tapes. Flashlight photographs taken by the investigators showed luminous connections between his body and the apports.

Another miner, Jack Webber, was photographed some years later producing an apport in a similar way. Webber, a Welshman, was famous as a physical medium at whose seances trumpets would levitate and spirit voices would speak to those present. At a seance in 1938, Webber was searched thoroughly by a policeman in front of all the sitters, then tied to a chair. This account of the seance is taken from Harry Edwards's book, *The mediumship of Jack Webber* (1939):

> The red light was on, sufficiently bright for all to see the medium with his arms bound to the chair. Trumpets were in levitation . . . one of these turned round, presenting its large opening to the solar plexus region and an object was heard to fall into it. It then came to the author who was asked to take out of the trumpet the article within – an Egyptian ornament. After a minute or two the trumpet again travelled to the solar plexus and another object was heard to fall into it.

In November of the same year, at a seance in Paddington, London, Webber's guide announced his intention of trying to materialise a brass ornament from an adjoining room. He asked for a photograph to be taken at a particular moment and said that this ought to record the production of the apport. The sitters then heard the sound of an object falling to the floor. When the plate was developed the small ornament – a bird weighing 2 ounces (57 grams) – could be seen apparently emerging in a white substance from the medium's solar plexus.



Above left: Sai Baba, worshipped as a modern Hindu saint, holds one of his many apports

Above: the ex-miner Jack Webber produces a cord-like string of ectoplasm. On several occasions small ornaments (top) were seen to take shape in a white cloud over his solar plexus, but when handled they were perfectly solid

American medium Keith Milton Rhinehart demonstrated apport mediumship in London in the 1960s at the Caxton Hall. In a well-lit hall, before a capacity audience, he produced a number of items from his mouth, including a very prickly sea horse. Semi-precious stones were also 'apported' *through* his body: they were found embedded in his skin and were plucked out by witnesses. Some members of the audience, however, were distinctly unimpressed: the stones were never seen to emerge through his skin and looked as if they had been deliberately implanted in his flesh. Similarly, some witnesses thought some of his 'apports' to have been merely regurgitated.

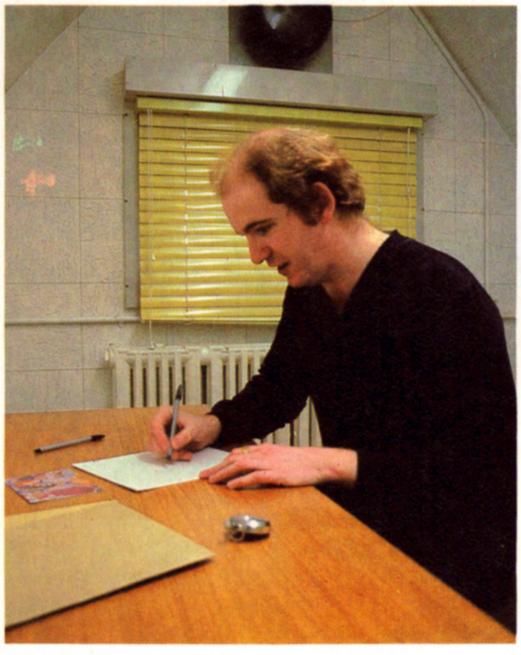
But a comparison of the best apport mediums does provide some striking similarities, which indicate that it is a genuine phenomenon. At the turn of the century, Henry Sausse recorded many instances, in *Des preuves? en voilà*, of apports produced by an entranced woman medium. Her method was to form her hands into a cup, in full light, and a small cloud was seen to form inside. This would transform itself instantly into an apport, such as a spray of roses, complete with flowers, buds and leaves.

Although there are countless similar stories of physical mediumship in the literature, the fact remains that apports are rare today. But other, no less remarkable feats of mediumship are constantly reported.

*Can spirits 'come through' and talk with their earthly voices? See page 1830*

# ESP unlimited

**The Ganzfeld experiments, designed to encourage telepathy in special laboratory conditions, have had the unexpected result of producing spontaneous ESP. CARL SARGENT describes how this 'spin-off' happens**



Left: Dr Carl Sargent, head of the Ganzfeld experiments at Cambridge. He himself participates in the tests, acting both as sender and receiver at various times

Below: a subject in the Ganzfeld state, ready to try to receive telepathic messages from a sender in another location. In the Ganzfeld environment, the subject is deprived of normal sight and sound

SPONTANEOUS ESP in the laboratory? It seems a contradiction in terms, but it occurs. Indeed, ESP experiments at the University of Cambridge have shown that the laboratory can even *stimulate* spontaneous ESP – a powerful rejoinder to those who object to scientific 'testing' of psi.

One particular kind of ESP experiment has dominated parapsychological work at Cambridge since 1978 – telepathy of subjects in the Ganzfeld state (see page 1430). Using pictures as targets, the 'receiver' in the experiment is kept in an environment of unchanging uniform light and sound for 30 minutes or so. For much of this time, a 'sender' at a distant location looks at one – and only one – randomly chosen target picture. This picture could be almost anything: a newspaper cutting, greeting card, art print or cartoon, for example. The receiver is asked to talk about his or her visual or auditory images, physical feelings, stray thoughts, everything, while the experimenter writes down everything said. At the end of the experiment the receiver is shown a set of four different pictures, one of which is a copy of the target picture viewed by the sender. Even the experimenter does not know which one it is. The receiver tries to pick it out on the basis of the impressions he or she had while in the Ganzfeld environment. The experiment is more sophisticated than this in detail, but this is the essence of it.

What the experimenters are looking for is a scoring rate that is well above the chance level. If chance alone operated, the correct picture would be chosen one time out of four, or 25 per cent of the time. In fact, the 'direct hit' rate from nearly 500 Ganzfeld test sessions at Cambridge is just over 39 per cent, notably higher than chance.

These simple and unobjectionable statistical tests give clear evidence of ESP in operation. But it is also clear that the statistics are not measuring all the ESP that occurs – after all, spontaneous ESP by definition cannot be detected with pre-designed statistical tests.

The receivers in the Ganzfeld tests often exhibit ESP unconnected to the target picture. For example, one receiver was plagued with a pain in his lower back during his session, although he typically did not suffer this. Later we learned that medical students had been listening to a lecture on rheumatism in a nearby lecture theatre. In another session filmed for television, an experimenter squashed a beetle that was crawling across the page on which he was writing down a receiver's comments. The receiver reported hearing The Beatles singing *Please please me* – an ironic verbal pun. Sometimes receivers pick up extraneous aspects of the feelings of other participants in experiments. Once, when I sat in my office fretting over a personal difficulty, a receiver experienced severe anxiety during her session. Such cases

## Two minds as one

The similarities – or correspondences – between two consecutive Ganzfeld experiments at Cambridge University on 25 August 1980 illustrate what is meant by 'crosstalk'. With no contact between them, Trevor Harley picked up on and described elements of Carl Sargent's responses in the earlier of the two tests. The remarks below are the exact words of the subjects.

**Sargent's session**
Cross shapes, crucifixes, floating.

A stag's head . . . very clear, or maybe a horse. Even a giraffe; the horse's head grew as I looked at it.
A huge variety of animals. It's like a bloody Noah's ark.

**Harley's session**
Someone being crucified.
Crucifix shapes and crosses.
A giraffe with its neck outstretched reaching up to a tree. Now its head turns into a horse's head.
The white dove hovering, branch in beak, looking at the ark. Noah is looking at it.

Below: the lady of the lake, the legendary figure who was supposed to have given King Arthur the great sword Excalibur. In independent tests held on the same day, two Ganzfeld subjects received impressions of her – an example of 'crosstalk'

Below right: a cartoon of Noah's ark by W. Heath Robinson. This painting has assumed a special place in the Ganzfeld tests, having more than once been the focus of crosstalk

This kind of crosstalk may be put down to common features in the environment – maybe the newspaper both receivers read that day contained something on Arthurian legends. But another example shows this cannot be the whole explanation. On 25 August 1980 I myself acted as a subject in a precognition experiment starting at 12.16 p.m. I scored a direct hit on a W. Heath Robinson picture of Noah's ark, called *Spring cleaning on the ark*. At 2.15 p.m. another subject, Trevor Harley, started his session in the same experiment. I had been careful to say absolutely nothing about my session to him, but the correspondences between his experiences and mine are really remarkable (see box). Incidentally, Harley had scored badly on the target picture. His ESP had been distracted by going through my memories rather than concentrated on receiving the target picture.

Receivers may also demonstrate precognition as well as ESP in their sessions. One student subject confided before a session that

of ESP have been reported from other laboratories. Stanley Krippner of the Maimonides Medical Center in New York reported a dream telepathy session in which he, as sender, was preoccupied with a stomach pain that he feared might require an operation. The dreamer picked up the theme of the stomach operation in detail, but not the target picture Krippner was looking at. Indeed, in all these cases cited, the receivers were not successful in picking up the target. Perhaps only so much ESP can operate at any one time.

Receivers may even 'crosstalk' – that is, detect and report elements from another receiver's session. In the Cambridge files are two transcripts in which the theme of 'the lady of the lake' – and more specifically, of her hand holding Arthur's sword aloft – is described. They were collected on the same day from two subjects who had no contact with each other.

he had a very strong impression that the target was going to show a Highland stag, because he had dreamed about such an animal being in the laboratory the night before. An antlered buck deer was a prominent feature of the target picture, and only two of the 220 potential targets then available contained such an animal.

Hugh Ashton, one of the regular receivers in the Cambridge Ganzfeld tests, has the strange facility of turning into a sender during his sessions. Ashton is a 25-year-old statistician who doubles as bass and keyboards player in a Cambridge band. He has made several outstanding ESP hits on targets. In the first session undertaken with this receiver, I acted as sender. When I opened the sealed envelope containing the randomly selected target picture for that session, it was a piece of feminist art. I knew at once, with complete certainty, – and correctly as it turned out – that Ashton had already identified the target and I knew exactly which part of the picture he had detected first. It was as if he had sent that information to me to be recognised when I saw the target.

A more dramatic example of a receiver-turned-sender occurred in a session on 27 March 1979 when the target picture was Renoir's *Le moulin de la gallette*. This picture shows a group of people at a French outdoor café, with a bottle and glasses on a table. In Ashton's mind these objects became a ouija board and he became a physical medium. (Anyone doubting that the Ganzfeld procedure can induce a genuinely altered state of consciousness should have heard his respiration rate treble.) As sender in that session, I had the most bizarre mental sensations I have ever experienced. I found it impossible to concentrate and 'send' the picture. It was like the mental equivalent of trying to walk through water, and in my session notes I specifically wrote, 'It feels as if I'm being hypnotised at a distance.' It is intriguing that I should have had this sensation at the time that Ashton imagined he was a medium.

Senders have also frequently and correctly noted impressions about what the receiver is experiencing and feeling – for example, being very anxious, feeling physically disorientated, experiencing floating sensations. But the senders could logically, if unconsciously, infer that anyone in the artificial Ganzfeld state might have such feelings.

Sometimes crosstalk occurs between experiments. In the course of one dream precognition experiment, the subject dreamed that the next two targets would be a B and a D picture. These were wrong for this experiment – but correct for another test going on at the same time.

The most striking cases of spontaneous ESP are the extended correspondences, of which two instances can be given. Hugh Ashton again figures in one. In a session run

on 27 November 1981 he acted as the receiver. I was the sender and a student, Julie Milton, was the experimenter. His first comment was that I had an envelope on which the number 39 was marked. Then he said that the picture was W. Heath Robinson's cartoon of Noah's ark. Now, this target (is there something significant about this particular picture?) had been used for a session on 20 November 1981 with me as receiver, Julie as sender, and another student, Sheila Bennett, as experimenter. Hugh knew nothing of the previous test and had no idea that this cartoon was in our pool of possible targets, by now expanded to over 340 pictures. He had exactly specified the target of the earlier test. The number 39 was the number of the set of pictures used in the next session involving myself, Julie and Sheila, but not Hugh. He seems to have picked up information from the past and future, with a startling exactness.

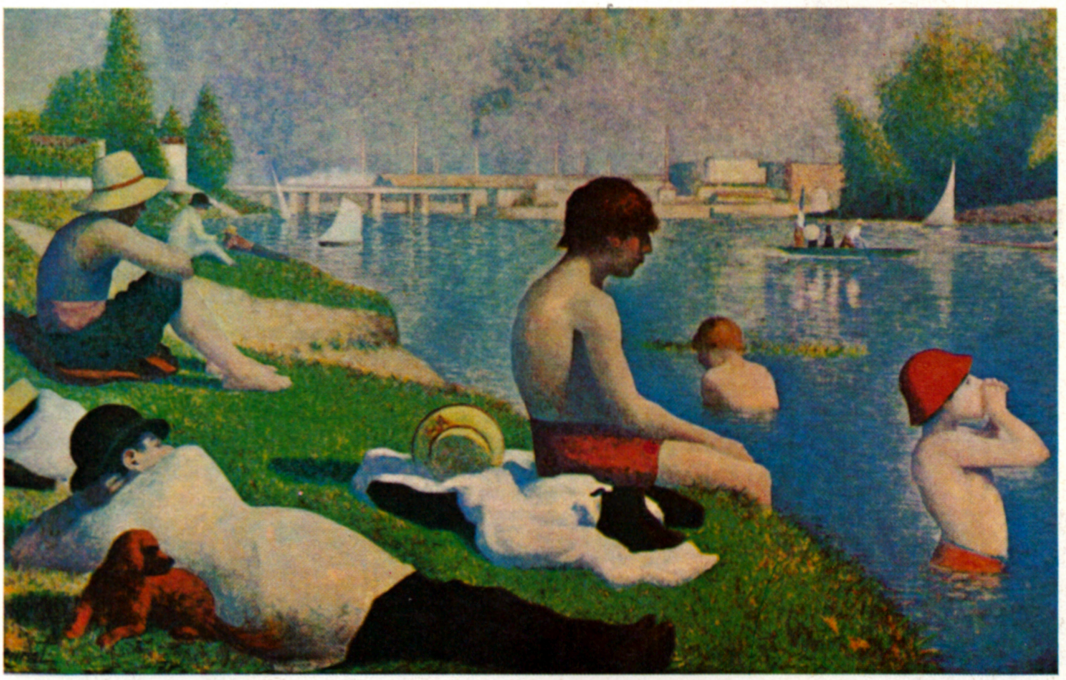
The second example is also intriguing. On 14 June 1981 a student subject tested by two other students gave as a first impression of the target a picture by the French artist Seurat. It must be said that such specific impressions are rather rare. Four days later, on the morning of 18 June 1981, a student experimenter, who knew nothing of the earlier session, woke and gazed at Seurat's picture of *The bathers*, which hung on her wall. That would make a nice target for the day's session, she said to herself. And it did so happen that it was the target picture that day. As was the practice, it was selected at random. The fourth student experimenter who picked picture set number 17 by chance had no idea that picture 17A was Seurat's *The bathers*. This ESP concentrated on Seurat continued: on 20 June yet another subject reported an impression of – indeed, the same painting. Apart from the two mentions on the 14th and 20th, sandwiching the test session in which *The bathers* was the actual target, I have only one other specific citing of Seurat from nearly 500 transcripts.

In my final illustration of spontaneous ESP in the laboratory, I cannot give full details because the sender wishes to remain anonymous. On the occasion in question, I was acting as experimenter. The sender reported seeing quite clearly an apparitional figure of me walk through the locked door of the room in which she was sitting, and look around.

What are we to make of all this – the receiver crosstalk, the receivers acting as senders, timeslips and even apparitions in the laboratory? As with anything spontaneous, it is impossible to prove paranormality. But to demand such proof is to miss the point. What is important is that spontaneous events do occur in the laboratory and that they are common to many experimenters. The laboratory is not after all hostile to spontaneous ESP. Indeed, the atmosphere of the experimental laboratory may even spark it. And perhaps we should not lament the fact that scientists cannot trap all the possible ESP in experiments with pre-planned statistical measurements. Although recent successful lines of experiments, such as the tests for altered states of consciousness, have a better repeatability record than anything previously reported in parapsychology, it is oddly satisfying to know that ESP still remains somewhat erratic and unpredictable. It may be of interest to know that my experience in the session with Hugh Ashton on that March night in 1979, when I felt my mental processes paralysed, did more to convince me of the reality of psi than any number of statistics. As far as I am concerned, ESP certainly exists – I literally felt it.

Below: Georges Seurat's *The bathers*, another of the target pictures for the Ganzfeld tests. During a four-day period in 1981, this particular picture sparked off a series of telepathic impressions from such unrelated sources that the events could only be described as spontaneous extra-sensory perception

Left: Hugh Ashton, a regular participant in the Ganzfeld experiments. Ashton has made several outstanding hits on ESP targets and has been known to turn into a sender during sessions when he is receiving



Below left: *Le moulin de la gallette*, a painting by the French Impressionist Renoir. This picture was a target on one of the occasions that Ashton reversed roles from subject to sender

# Theatre of blood

**Psychic surgeons have been widely criticised by those who allege that their methods are fraudulent. Nevertheless, many of them seem genuinely able to heal their patients. Why does psychic surgery work? DAVID HARVEY ponders this puzzling question**

BELIEVERS IN THE REALITY of psychic surgery must have been surprised to read reports that Antonio 'Doctor Tony' Agpaoa resorted to the surgeon's knife when he was suffering from appendicitis in 1979. The man who had built up a reputation for his bare-hand surgery entered hospital under an assumed name in preference to undergoing treatment at the hands of his fellow Filipino miracle workers. He is reported to have confided to the surgeon who operated on him, 'You know, doc, physicians can't heal themselves.'

Here is one more mystery in the saga of the psychic surgeons through which are woven claims of miracles, allegations of fraud, and evidence that is confusingly contradictory.

The visit to the UK in 1978 of the Elizaldes, a husband-and-wife team practising psychic surgery, roused considerable interest because it appeared to offer scientists an opportunity to study the phenomenon closely at first hand. Perhaps, at last, they would be able to find a definitive answer to the many questions that the reports of psychic surgery had raised. In the event, the scandal the Elizaldes were to leave in their wake simply served to deepen the conviction of the cynics that the whole business was based on fraud, an explanation that, for many people, rang all too true.

David and Helen Elizalde's first UK visit in 1978 was sponsored by the Spiritualists' National Union (SNU). Although they live in Australia, David Elizalde is Filipino by birth and his wife is English of Cypriot parentage. They claim to be able to penetrate the human body with their hands, in the same way as the native Filipino psychic surgeons, leaving the patient's body unblemished and free from scars. After the visit there were several testimonies to the effectiveness of their work, including reports of cures and improvements.

In 1979 they returned to give treatment to the sick at the SNU's headquarters at Stansted Hall, Essex. The operations were carried out in conditions screened from public gaze. Patients were required to make a prior appointment, and the literature put out by the SNU stressed that no 'unauthorised' people would be allowed to be present. If patients wished to be accompanied by another person, a special request had to be made on

Below left: the Paraguayan psychic surgeon Ivan Trilha demonstrates a leg operation in Mexico City in 1979, under the watchful eyes of parapsychologists Bill Roll (left) and Hans Bender (right, next to cameraman)

Right: David and Helen Elizalde perform an operation using bare-hand surgery. On one of their visits to Britain, in 1979, their work was subjected to close scrutiny by the BBC television programme *Nationwide* – whose investigators concluded that they were frauds. Nevertheless, many of the Elizaldes' patients swear that they have been effectively cured

Below: the Brazilian psychic surgeon Tony Agpaoa. Agpaoa notched up an impressive record of successes – and yet, when he became ill with appendicitis in 1979, he went to hospital for treatment by orthodox doctors rather than seek the help of his fellow psychic surgeons

the application form. Were these precautions simply designed to make for better operating conditions? It seems unlikely – for they do not seem to be necessary for other psychic surgeons, who regularly carry out their work in front of observers. Or were they designed to keep out the prying eyes of critical observers? Suspicions that this might have been so were strengthened by the forthright and scathing condemnation made by BBC-TV's *Nationwide* programme in May 1979.

The *Nationwide* evidence was made up of several elements: a film of the Elizaldes at work, and a critical commentary on it by the arch-sceptic and conjurer James Randi, interviews with patients and forensic reports on some of the blood and other substances produced during the operations.

While the *Nationwide* film looked impressive at first sight, Randi was able to point out, in a frame-by-frame analysis, that what was going on was almost certainly faked. He pointed to a number of sequences that, he maintained, were standard sleight-of-hand tricks. The surgeons did not have their fingers buried deeply inside their patients, but simply folded them, pressing down on the flesh with their knuckles. This is all very well – but where does the blood and gore come from? It was obvious to Randi. He showed how they could have been 'palmed' during the operation by the non-operating partner, who was ostensibly there simply to pass swabs and lend assistance to the other. Randi claimed that at one stage David Elizalde held his hand 'exactly as a conjurer would if he had concealed something in his hand'. He was able to give a fair imitation of a bare-hand operation incorporating the ploys he had noted on the film.

## Unacceptable evidence?

The case for fraud was reinforced by forensic tests carried out on samples of blood retrieved from an operation on Gordon Higginson, then president of the SNU. Unknown to the psychic surgeons, members of the *Nationwide* team were present incognito, and assisted during the operation. One of them held the bowl into which blood-stained cotton wool and blood clots were dropped. Analysis at a forensic laboratory showed that it was pig's blood. Blood-spattered clothing belonging to Higginson and another patient was also tested, and the same finding was made. Confronted by the evidence, Higginson simply refused to accept the report. 'I think that this is just put up. I think they [the forensic experts] are telling an untruth. I know that it is genuine.' Helen Elizalde had another line. 'Well, I think it is very strange, although I have heard that the structure of the blood does change.'

*Nationwide* reporter Roger Cook drew attention to this refusal to accept what seemed to be clinching proof:

> despite this overwhelming scientific evidence, the SNU won't admit that they've bought a pig in a poke, and that they've brought to this country, at great expense, two confidence tricksters, because that's what the Elizaldes are: unscrupulous, frauds and liars, exploiting the chronically sick. If they dispute this then they're of course quite at liberty to take us to court. I doubt very much that they will because they know full well that what they're doing won't stand up to any properly conducted investigation.

The matter did not rest there. After they had left the country, the Elizaldes became the subject of an investigation by the Director of Public Prosecutions who, in September 1981, announced that if the Elizaldes returned to the UK, they would be arrested and held for questioning and would face possible prosecution. Despite the allegations, however, there were still a number of people who claimed they had been helped by the Elizaldes, and jumped to their defence.

A retired nurse and midwife, Hilda Totty, who had acted as assistant to the Elizaldes on scores of occasions, had herself been operated on twice for sinus trouble, with complete success. 'I am free from discomfort,' she told *Psychic News*. 'Before my sinuses were blocked which caused headaches and eye pain. Now it's gone. I can taste food; before, I could not.' Others have come forward and vouched for the benefit that they received. But if we accept this evidence for the moment, does it mean that psychic surgery may still be a reality? Perhaps.

Doctors know the value of suggestion. A persuasive bedside manner has always been suspected to be a powerful force in promoting improvement in the condition of patients. Formal confirmation by medical

Left: conjurer James Randi simulates psychic surgery. In the investigation of the Elizaldes by the BBC television programme *Nationwide*, Randi was able to demonstrate that every single effect produced by the Elizaldes could be duplicated by conjurers' tricks

Below: Gordon Higginson, president of the SNU, who was treated by the Elizaldes during their 1979 visit. Blood that had appeared to come from Higginson's body was analysed after the operation – and turned out to be pig's blood. *Nationwide* reporter Roger Cook (bottom) concluded that the Elizaldes were 'unscrupulous, frauds and liars, exploiting the chronically sick'

science of the placebo effect – the fact that, with enough faith in their doctors, patients will improve markedly even if they are administered sugar pills instead of real drugs – showed that there was definitely something in this belief. Confidence in the treatment and an expectation of results can be enough for physical changes to occur. Could the performance of a sham operation, with impressive blood-and-gore props, have the same effect? It seems quite possible that it could. In this case, the psychic surgeon would be manipulating the patient's propensity to believe in the authenticity of the psychic operation to bring about improvements. Of course, the psychic surgeon would have to protect the authenticity of his operation for the mind cure to work.

José Silva, founder of the Silva Mind Control system, a method of dynamic meditation, self-healing and related techniques, studied a wide range of phenomena including the potential of mind power. What he saw carried out in the name of psychic surgery was, he found, a sham, but it could nonetheless be dramatically beneficial for the patient. Someone complaining of pains in the head, for example, would lie down while the surgeon wielded a knife with which, he assured the patient, he would cut out the cause of the discomfort. The knife was lunged at the patient's head and buried in the pillow, which had been stuffed with chickens' entrails. The surgeon triumphantly showed the patient the offending growth he had cut out, and the patient went away believing that he had been treated successfully. It was, of course, the mind that did the real healing work. That puts a rather different complexion on the practice of psychic surgery. On one point Silva and the *Nationwide* team were in agreement: they both observed what they believed was an elaborate theatrical performance. In the respective cases of the psychic surgeons they investigated, they reached totally different conclusions about their motivation. Where Silva found a genuine desire to heal, *Nationwide* identified merely a desire for financial gain.

That the Elizaldes did benefit from their 14-day trip was confirmed by a subsequent statement by the SNU. In addition to paying for their trip and other costs, the £10 charged per patient generated fees of £2500 for the couple.

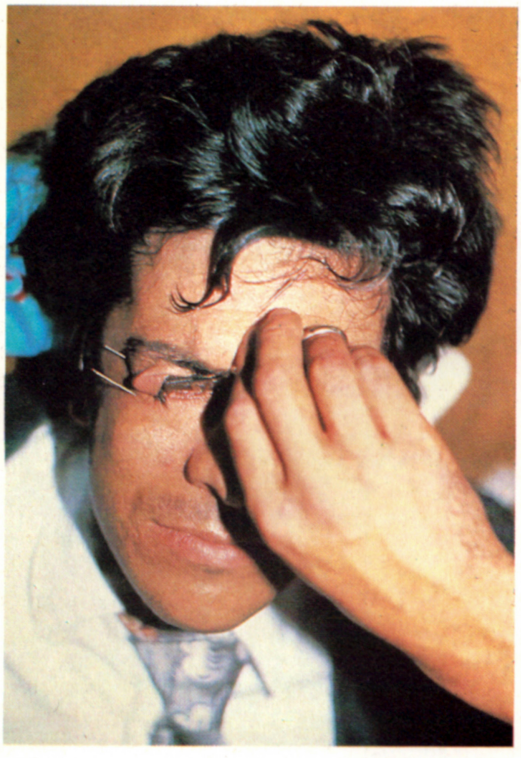
If *Nationwide's* conclusion was correct, is it reasonable to assume that all other psychic surgeons are necessarily concerned only with profit? Lyall Watson attempts to put the problem of fraud into context in *The Romeo error*, written in 1973, when there had already been allegations that exploitation and fraud were the realities behind psychic surgery:

> During the last three years there has been a great deal of publicity, both good and bad, concerning the Philippine healers. Tens of thousands of foreign patients have been attracted to Manila. Where there is such a demand, accompanied as it is by the offer of considerable sums of money from desperate people, there will be those who will do anything to meet that demand and obtain the proffered rewards. . . . But it is sad that the commotion should be allowed to obscure the fact that something very extraordinary still happens in the Philippines.

### Suspicion of fraud

It is tempting to use examples of fraud to provide a universal explanation for psychic surgery. After all, that way there is no need to ponder the staggering implications of the practice if it were ever proved genuine. But what if it is – in some cases: despite extensive investigations of the Brazilian José Arigo, for example, his rusty-knife surgery was never exposed as fraud (see page 378).

The real problem arises when we come to explain psychic surgery as a real phenomenon. Alfred Stelter, the German investigator who made his own on-the-spot study of Agpaoa and other psychic surgeons (see page 1770), thoroughly investigated the contradictory evidence that has been advanced variously to support and demolish the claims for their authenticity. He points out the difficulty that the materialistic mind has in accepting evidence that defies any attempt to be measured by the yardstick of scientific appraisal. His book *Psi-healing* contains many examples of failures or partial successes of psychic surgery, along with remarkable cures. There are also several telling case studies of attempts to investigate psychic surgery in which the evidence has been



Left: Ivan Trilha performs an eye operation

Below: a Filipino psychic surgeon known as Marcello conducts a stomach operation in this photograph, taken by the German journalist Gunther Leeb. Leeb spent three weeks on a filming mission in the Philippines in 1971, during which time he himself underwent psychic surgery for a chronic ailment of the lower abdomen, at the hands of Marcello and another psychic surgeon. Their treatment apparently effected a complete cure

loaded in the final report to fit the conclusion that the authors want to reach. Like Lyall Watson, Stelter comes to the conclusion that there is something behind the claims, although he does not pretend to have fathomed the secrets of psychic surgery. Doctor Tony does, he concedes, sometimes work miracles.

What may be involved, he speculates, is a kind of temporary suspension of physical reality in which there is some subtle interplay between spiritual and physical energies, manipulated by the psychic surgeon. Matter materialises in odd and unpredictable ways but, according to the cases Stelter has investigated, it is not through trickery.

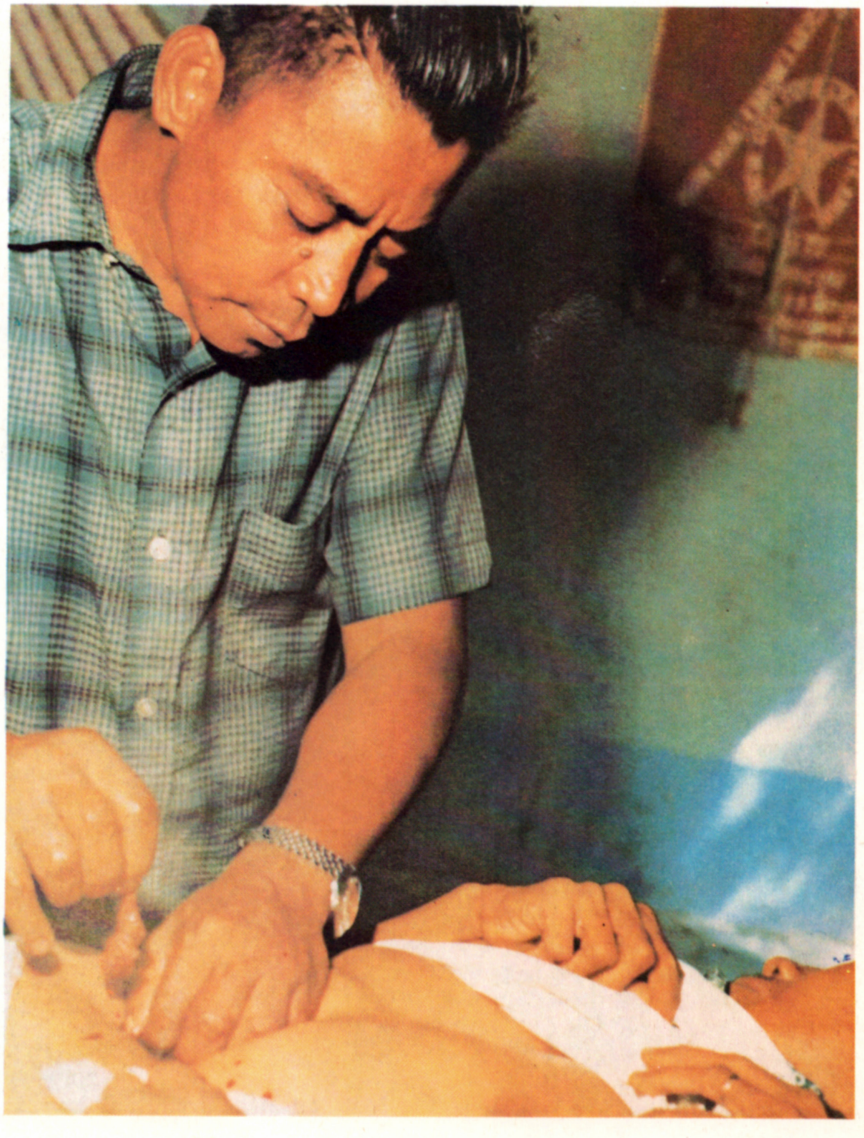
Ultimately, it does seem that there is a spectrum of explanations for what is claimed to be psychic surgery. At one extreme there are outright frauds and deceptions intended to exploit the tragic plight of the sick. Somewhere in the middle there are the theatrical performances that Silva observed, intended to trigger psychogenic, or mind, cures. Both are comprehensible in the light of Western beliefs and values. But Western understanding fails before José Arigo's rusty-knife surgery and bare-hand operations.

Confronted by the inexplicable, many researchers feel that all they can do is acknowledge the problem and try to live with it. Stelter felt that he could deny neither his own experience of psychic surgery nor the corroborative evidence he and other scientists unearthed, notwithstanding the perplexing problems it raised for Western minds.

> The Philippine healers bring about astonishing results, but there is no way yet to quantify their success. The significance of psychic surgery, in my view, lies less in the cure of one or another sufferer who could not be helped in Europe, but in the fact that the surgery goes beyond the frame of reference of Western science; given further research, this will lead to new spiritual and scientific territory and tending to revolutionize our whole picture of man.

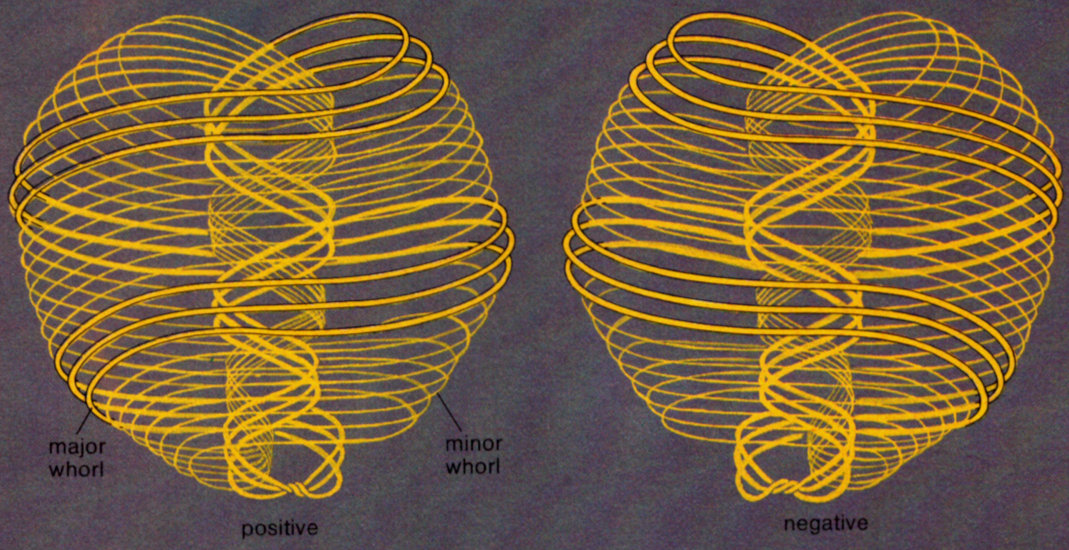
Stelter's is a challenging conclusion that clashes with the more brutal findings of investigations such as *Nationwide*'s of the Elizaldes. It is certainly far more difficult to grasp than the bold accusation that the psychic surgeons were no more than liars and frauds who set out to exploit the sick in an unscrupulously heartless way. Stelter's seems both an exciting and a reasonable conclusion – and yet there are snags. What of Agpaoa? If, as Stelter suggests, he was a miracle worker, why did he turn to orthodox medicine for help when he was ill? There is no simple answer that resolves all the facts and, despite the desire for neatly packaged, definitive solutions to mysteries such as this one, perhaps there never can be.

*On page 1838: a first-hand account of treatment at the hands of a psychic surgeon*



# A penetrating vision

**Modern physicists are probing ever deeper into the structure of matter, using costly and sophisticated technology. However, STEPHEN M. PHILLIPS asks whether some of their discoveries have been made before – by means of ancient Indian yoga techniques**




Left: the two kinds of 'ultimate physical atom' seen clairvoyantly by Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater. The 'atoms' consisted of currents of energy forming spiral whorls. Colours constantly flashed out, changing according to which spiral was most active. The 'atoms' spun incessantly

THE TWO FIGURES WHO DOMINATED the Theosophical Society at the end of the 19th century, Annie Besant and Charles W. Leadbeater, began in 1895 a series of researches that was to last nearly 40 years. They were studying the ultimate structure of matter, using methods that orthodox science did not countenance: they were attempting to view atoms by extra-sensory perception. The vast amounts of information they produced seemed to bear no relationship to the findings of chemists and physicists during those four decades. Only in the 1980s were resemblances noticed between their descriptions and the modern theory of the structure of fundamental particles. It now seems possible that Besant and Leadbeater saw by occult means the 'quarks' that physicists postulate as the building blocks of matter.

The power of viewing the very small is one of the *siddhis*, or psychic faculties, that, according to Eastern tradition, can be cultivated by yoga meditation. In the ancient *Yoga sutras* the semi-legendary sage Patanjali lists the *siddhis*: one of them is the power to gain 'knowledge of the small, the hidden, or the distant by directing the light of a superphysical faculty'. This ability to acquire 'knowledge of the small' will be called 'micro-psi' in this article. Besant and Leadbeater claimed to have gained their micro-psi abilities under the tutelage of their Indian gurus.

To acquire knowledge paranormally that is confirmed by conventional science only many years later is perhaps the most convincing type of ESP. In such cases there is no possibility that the psychic has access to normal sources of information. Whether or not the ESP was exercised under controlled laboratory conditions, it is impossible in principle to gain information by fraud or by means of the normal senses.

In 1895 Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater published pictures of what they

Below: Annie Besant with Charles Leadbeater. They divided their work while clairvoyantly viewing matter on the small scale, the highest magnifications being achieved by Mrs Besant. Their observations were in conflict with the science of their time

## Window on the whorls

The diagrams drawn from the descriptions provided by the two Theosophists Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater give only a faint impression of the spectacle they witnessed. What they saw was confirmed by later clairvoyants using micro-psi (the faculty of viewing the very small) in the late 1950s. Initially a mist or haze of light appeared when they observed matter on the microscopic scale. With greater magnification the mist was resolved into myriad points of light, scintillating and moving chaotically. Some moved in regular orbits, forming the seven minor and three major whorls of the 'atoms'. Some cascaded, like showers of meteors. The motions of the 'atoms' were confined to well-defined volumes of space, in any one of seven different geometric forms.

Each 'ultimate physical atom' was enclosed in a 'bubble', as if some transparent membrane surrounded it. The Theosophists spoke of space itself being pushed back by the dynamic activity of the matter in the 'atom'. This accorded with the complex theories of Theosophy, in which what we normally regard as a vacuum was only one of the seven states of matter.

claimed were hydrogen, nitrogen and oxygen atoms present in the air. According to their description a hydrogen atom was

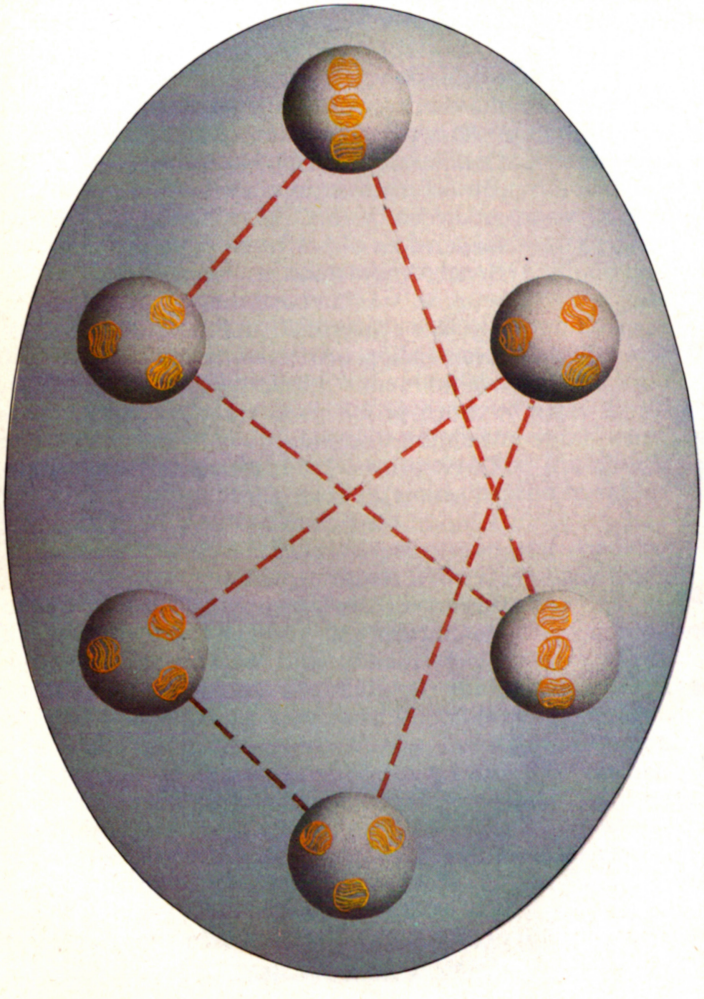
> seen to consist of six small bodies, contained in an egg-like form . . . . It rotated with great rapidity on its own axis, vibrating at the same time, the internal bodies performing similar gyrations. The whole atom spins and quivers and has to be steadied before exact observation is possible. The six little bodies are arranged in two sets of three, forming two triangles that are not interchangeable.

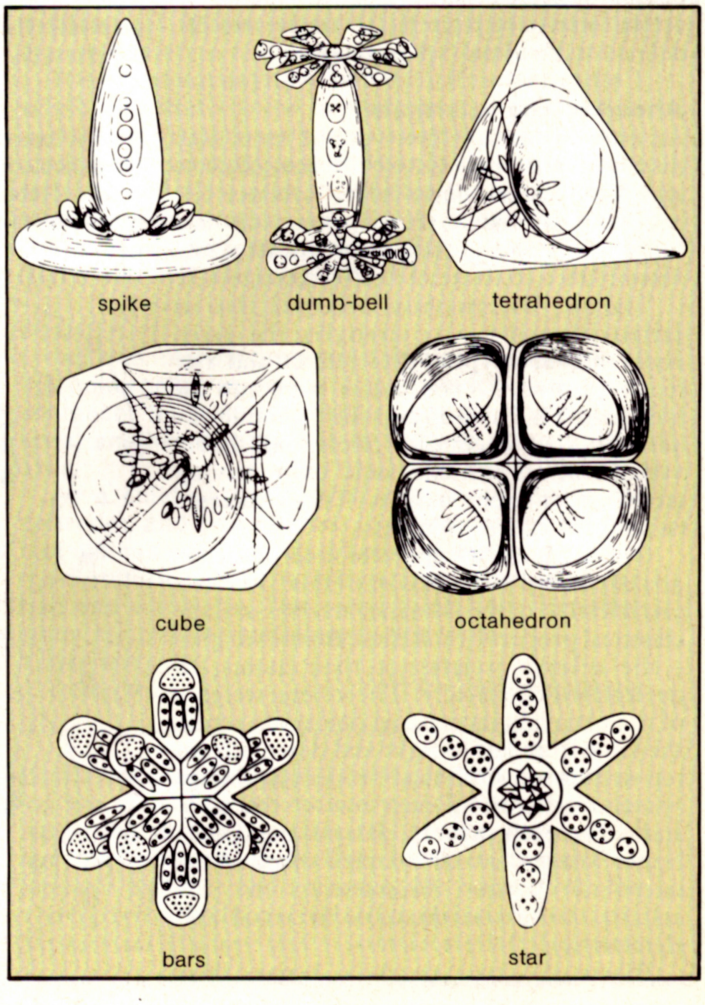
Below left: the atom of hydrogen, according to Besant and Leadbeater. It was a transparent egg-shaped body containing smaller globes arranged in two interlinked triangles. Each one of the globes contained three of the 'ultimate physical atoms'

Below right: the seven geometrical forms of the micro-psi 'atoms'

But the 'six little bodies' were not the most basic units of matter. The psychics could magnify the images of them and found that each was composed of a globe enclosing three 'points of light'. When these in turn were highly magnified, they appeared as particles of definite size. Besant and Leadbeater called them 'ultimate physical atoms'.

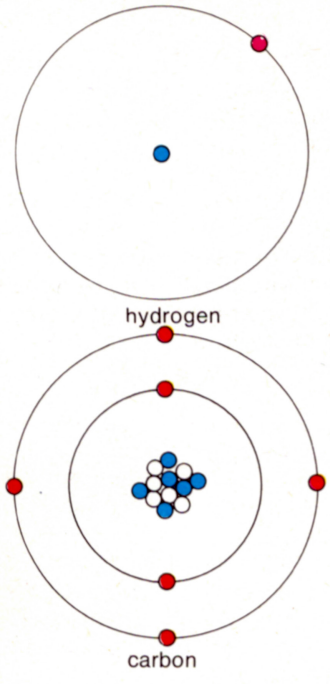
Each of these 'ultimate' particles was seen to be made up of 10 convoluted spiral curves, or whorls, three of which (the 'major' whorls) appeared thicker or brighter than the other seven ('minor') whorls. The overall form of the whorls was that of a heart, with





one end slightly concave and the other end pointed.

The Theosophists' description of matter differed greatly from the contemporary scientific notions of the atom. Two centuries earlier Sir Isaac Newton had conjectured that atoms were 'solid, massy, impenetrable'. In 1895 it was suspected that atoms in fact had a structure and that they were composed of smaller electrically charged particles. One of these was the electron, a hypothetical negatively charged particle much lighter than an atom. Electric currents were thought to consist of electrons in motion. In 1897 the electron's existence was demonstrated by the English physicist J. J. Thomson. Various models of the structure of the atom were then proposed. But the theory that finally won acceptance, as the result of the experimental and theoretical analyses of the physicists H. Geiger, E. Marsden and Lord Rutherford, was that of the 'nuclear' atom. They showed that the electrons in an atom orbited a tiny nucleus in which all the atom's positive charge and most of its mass were concentrated. When this was first demonstrated, from 1909 onwards, the electrons were supposed to move in well-defined orbits like those of the planets. They whirled around the nucleus millions of times per second, in a volume with a ten-millionth of the breadth of a pinhead. In the 1920s, with the advent of quantum mechanics, the electrons and their orbits came to be regarded as 'fuzzy' and ill-defined in position (see page 856).




Above: in the scientific picture, the nucleus of hydrogen is a single positively charged particle, the proton. The nuclei of heavier atoms, such as carbon, consist of protons and neutral particles called neutrons. Negatively charged electrons circle the nucleus

### Ahead of the scientists

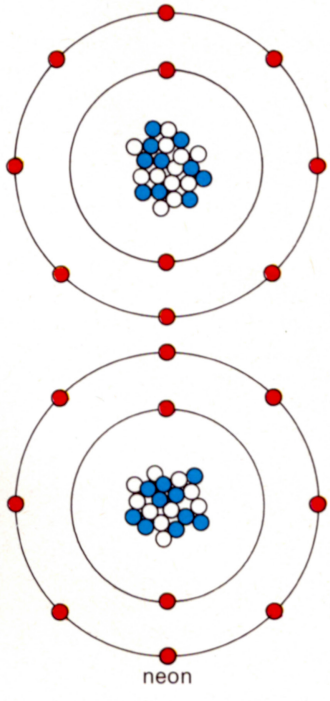
As each scientific picture of the atom was discarded and replaced by the next, Besant and Leadbeater continued to produce remarkably consistent descriptions of their 'micro-psi atoms', which at no time bore any resemblance to those of the scientists.

The two Theosophists observed that in certain elements – for example, the gases neon, argon, krypton and xenon and the metal platinum – the atoms were not all identical. This anticipated the scientific realisation that chemically indistinguishable variants of an element could exist, having atoms of different masses. These variants came to be called 'isotopes'.

One of the most important tools of orthodox chemistry is the periodic table. This is a classification of the elements in terms of their chemical properties and their atomic weights – the relative weights of their atoms, as determined chemically. The atomic weights of the elements increase as one reads across the table from left to right and down it from top to bottom. Chemical properties change systematically along each row of the table and down each column. Besant and Leadbeater found that the complex shape of the micro-psi 'atom' corresponded to the column of the periodic table in which that element lay.

When the two psychics began their research, between 60 and 70 elements were known (of the 90 or so that occur in nature) and there were many gaps in the periodic table. Besant and Leadbeater described a number of types of micro-psi 'atom' that corresponded, they believed, to gaps in the periodic table. The existence of these elements, and many of their properties, could be predicted by conventional science, but they had not yet been observed.

Below: isotopes of an element such as neon have equal numbers of protons, but different numbers of neutrons




The two psychics discovered that the number of 'ultimate' particles in the micro-psi 'atoms' was very nearly equal to 18 times the atomic weight of the corresponding element. (The atomic weight of an element is the average weight of the atoms of its various isotopes. Scientists at that time took their unit to be the weight of the hydrogen atom.) Thus hydrogen, with the atomic weight 1, had 18 'ultimate' particles; carbon, with an atomic weight of 12, had 216.

The 'atoms' that the two psychics described were sometimes seen to be combined into larger units, just as the corresponding chemical atoms combined into larger groupings, called molecules. The micro-psi 'atoms' were combined in the same numbers as the atoms known to science. But, in total violation of all that was known to chemistry, micro-psi 'atoms' were observed to be broken up and their constituent particles mixed with those of other atoms. Sceptics felt that this discredited Besant and Leadbeater's claims, since chemical atoms do not split up and mix with each other wholesale when they combine, though they share or transfer some outer electrons.

Other problems emerged. For example, Leadbeater described the micro-psi molecule of the compound benzene as being octahedral – that is, as having the overall shape of an eight-faced solid. But chemists already knew that the chemical molecule of benzene was flat and hexagonal. And the psychics described micro-psi 'atoms' of several supposed elements for which there was no room whatever in the periodic table.

Such problems as these add up to overwhelming evidence against the two Theosophists' interpretation of the micro-psi 'atoms' as being the atoms studied by the chemist. Neither could they have been the nuclei of atoms, which do not split up in chemical reactions. What, then, were they? If they were merely hallucinations, why should the number of 'ultimate' constituents, of which there could be several thousand, always have been 18 times the correct atomic weight? Why should the forms described by Besant and Leadbeater have correlated with the position of the element in the periodic table? How could the two workers have 'guessed' that some atoms exist in different forms five years before scientists suspected the existence of isotopes?

*On page 1834: how the quark theory ties in with the occult chemists' descriptions*

# Post script

**Your letters to THE UNEXPLAINED**

Dear Sir,
You asked for letters from people who have had paranormal experiences. This letter concerns my daughter, who is now 18. When she was 15 she became deeply involved with a boy and became pregnant. The boy subsequently dropped her, and as a result she became very bitter towards him.

One Saturday morning a few weeks after he had jilted her, my daughter told me of a dream she had just had. In it the boy had been playing rugby and had broken his ankle. The injury was severe enough to prevent him playing rugby for two seasons. I told her that it was just wishful thinking on her part – a sort of mental striking out at him.

But that afternoon we heard that the boy had indeed been injured and taken to hospital. Later in the week we were told that his ankle had been broken and it was doubtful whether he would play rugby or any other sport for quite some time.

Did she have a brief look into the future? Or is it at all possible – because of her intense hostility towards the boy – that she somehow made it happen?

Perhaps I should end by saying that my daughter now has a beautiful little girl and is managing very well on her own.

Yours faithfully,
*J. L. Nicholson* (Mrs) Taupo, New Zealand

*We have not heard of curses being laid in dreams, but that doesn't mean it can never happen. For some startling stories of more 'conventional' curses see page 1761.*

Dear Sir,
I have had many uncanny experiences over the years; this one occurred in the autumn of 1960.

I was walking along the then A2 road in Northfleet in Kent when out of the sky a large, blue fluorescent ball hurtled towards me. It seemed to be made of gas, which swirled about within a clearly defined circumference. There was no noise – in fact everything had suddenly gone very quiet.

As the ball hurtled towards me it flashed through my mind that it was going to strike me. Instead I was bathed in a bluish light that rooted me to the spot. I was terrified. Suddenly the ball veered away to the north-west (it had approached from the south-west) and disappeared. I trembled and shook. But after a while I was able to move again. I decided to report what I had seen to the police.

I went to Gravesend police station and reported what I had seen to the Station Officer. He gave me a very strange look. He said, 'Have you been drinking, mate?' I assured him that I had not and that I wanted him to record what I had seen. He said: 'Sorry, mate, but there is no way that I am going to put that in the book.' I asked why not and he replied: 'Because I think you were seeing things.' When I protested strongly, an Inspector came out of a nearby office and asked what the trouble was. I explained, but he agreed with the Station Officer. I told them they would be sorry when they read about it in the papers the next day, but there was no mention of it. So I ended up thinking I must have been seeing things after all.

Several months later I was discussing the Gemini rocket that was orbiting the Earth with the gate-keeper at the foundry where I worked. This led on to the subject of UFOs and Ernie, the gate-keeper, told me that he had had a frightening experience with a UFO several months previously. I asked him approximately when and he said it had been in the autumn of 1960, at night. I stopped him there and said, 'Ernie, I'll tell you what you saw.' I then related my own experience of that time and he replied: 'That's almost right, only the one I saw was red.'

Ernie said that he wanted me to tell someone else what I had just told him and he called someone on the internal phone. When his friend arrived, Ernie changed his mind about my telling the experience first and asked his friend to tell what had happened to them. Their experience was similar to mine apart from the object hurtling towards them and the colour, which the friend also said was red.

The final experience I want to write about happened in the 1970s. I was in bed and awoke suddenly in the early hours of the morning. I felt a presence in my bedroom. By this time I was thoroughly awake. I saw a figure standing by the bedroom door. It was dressed in a silvery suit and wore a helmet with a visor. I could see no features through the visor. As I looked at the figure, it turned its head. I noticed that the suit did not appear to move or crinkle as the head was turning, as though the visor was moving round the helmet without disturbing the 'fabric'. The figure appeared to have no lower limbs below the knees. I probably saw the figure for a few seconds. Then, as suddenly as it had appeared, it disappeared – as though someone had switched off the television.

The experiences I have related are perfectly true. I would add that I know immediately when there is something wrong in my home or with my loved ones. I also have an uncanny feeling when things are not right in the course of my work and this has led to my making many arrests as a security officer. I can tell when someone is watching me on the job.
*Name and address supplied*

Dear Sir,
I read with interest the article entitled 'Paradoxes of the poltergeist' in issue 19, particularly noting the sentence: 'If a disturbance has taken place in a given area, another disturbance is likely to occur in that area.'

As a child of 13 I moved into my brother's old bedroom, and on a number of occasions my mother had difficulty in entering it because during the night the furniture had been rearranged – including the bed and wardrobe. The same thing had happened when my brother had slept in the room.

Yours faithfully,
*J. Cole* (Mrs) Chelmsford, Essex

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*Errata: in issue 39, page 774, the caption accompanying the picture of the reliquary of St Francis Xavier states that it is in the cathedral at Goa, Portugal; in fact the reliquary is in Goa, India, a former Portuguese colony. And in issue 78, page 1543, the photograph identified as showing Herr Adam actually shows Paul Brunner of the German electricity board.*

Send *your* letters to THE UNEXPLAINED, Orbis House, 20–22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT

THE WORLD'S MYSTERIOUS PLACES – 37
Giant's causeway, County Antrim, Northern Ireland